International Journal of Advance and Applied Research
www.ijaar.co.in
ISSN – 2347-7075 Impact Factor – 8.141
Peer Reviewed Bi-Monthly
Vol. 7 No. 15 January – February - 2026

Brand Imitation and Its Impact on Maharashtra's Garment Industry: An Empirical Analysis

Mayur Kamble[1] & Prof. Dr. Parag Kadam[2]
[1]Research Scholar
[2]Research Guide
Economic Research Centre of New arts, commerce & Science College, Ahilyanagar. (Autonomous) Maharashtra.
Corresponding Author – Mayur Kamble
DOI - 10.5281/zenodo.18861165

Abstract:

Brand imitation has become a significant challenge within Maharashtra's garment industry, affecting both market performance and consumer perception. The growing presence of counterfeit and look-alike apparel products has disrupted authentic brand growth, reduced profit margins, and weakened brand loyalty among customers. Counterfeit readymade garments in India pose a serious threat to economic growth and employment by displacing legitimate production and sales (Misra & Misra, 2023)[1] this study aims to empirically analyze the extent of brand imitation in the garment sector and its economic, social, and competitive implications. Using quantitative survey data collected from garment manufacturers, retailers, and consumers across major textile hubs such as Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, and Ichalkaranji, the research investigates factors that influence the demand for imitated products, including price sensitivity, quality perception, and brand value awareness. The findings indicate that brand imitation leads to unfair competition, decline in original brand equity, loss of employment opportunities, and reduced innovation in the apparel sector. The study concludes that strict enforcement of intellectual property laws, promotion of consumer awareness, and adoption of advanced branding and labeling technologies are essential to control the spread of brand imitation and protect genuine manufacturers. The research provides practical implications for policymakers, business stakeholders, and fashion entrepreneurs seeking sustainable industry growth.

Keywords: Brand Imitation, Counterfeit Apparel, Garment Industry, Brand Equity, Consumer Behavior, Intellectual Property Rights, Market Competition, Maharashtra, Fashion Industry, Empirical Study.

Introduction:

The garment industry in Maharashtra is one of the fastest-growing and economically significant sectors, contributing substantially to employment generation, industrial development, and export revenue. Major textile and apparel hubs such as Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, Solapur, Kolhapur, and Ichalkaranji play a central role in shaping the regional and national fashion market. However, the rapid expansion of the industry has also led to increasing challenges, among which brand imitation and the widespread circulation of counterfeit apparel products have emerged as critical concerns. A study on Maharashtra's textile heritage underlines that knowledge of regional fabric types and weaving traditions can help trace the geographic origin of textiles used in illicit activities, including counterfeiting (IJSRST, 2024).[2] Brand imitation—defined as the unauthorized production, replication, or sale of apparel goods closely resembling established brands—has negatively affected market integrity

and fair competition. The availability of low-cost duplicate garments influences consumer purchasing behavior, reduces demand for original branded products, and creates confusion regarding product authenticity. Consumers often choose imitated brands due to affordability, limited awareness of intellectual property rights, and the perception of similar quality, further aggravating the market disruption.

For authentic manufacturers, brand imitation results in declining revenue, diminished brand equity, weakened innovation incentives, and increased operational risks. Small and medium garment enterprises face greater challenges, as they may lack sufficient legal and technological resources to combat counterfeiting. In addition, the informal sector's involvement in imitation production contributes to unregulated labor conditions and loss of employment stability. Despite existing legal frameworks such as trademark laws and intellectual property protections in India, enforcement remains inconsistent, allowing the imitation market to grow. This situation creates a significant threat to the sustainability and competitiveness of Maharashtra's garment industry.

Aims and Objectives:

Aim:

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the extent, causes, and consequences of brand imitation in Maharashtra's garment industry and to assess its impact on genuine manufacturers, retailers, and consumer behavior through empirical investigation.

Objectives:

1. To examine the prevalence and patterns of brand imitation within major garment markets and production centers in Maharashtra.
2. To analyze the impact of brand imitation on the growth, profitability, and competitiveness of original garment manufacturers and retailers.
3. To recommend effective strategies, regulatory measures, and technological solutions to minimize brand imitation and safeguard authentic garment brands.

Review of Literature:

Brand Imitation and its Impact on Maharashtra's Garment Industry: An Empirical Analysis

Conceptualizing Brand Imitation and Counterfeiting:

The literature distinguishes between brand imitation (look-alikes, deliberate style copying, near-replicas) and counterfeiting (unauthorized use of a protected trademark or logo). Both undermine original brands but differ in legal status and consumer awareness. Research frames imitation as a market phenomenon driven by demand for lower-priced status cues, supply-side opportunism, and weak enforcement.

Demand-side Drivers: Consumer Behaviour and Market Forces:

Studies consistently identify price sensitivity, desire for status symbols, limited access to originals, and low awareness of intellectual property (IP) issues as primary reasons consumers purchase imitated garments. Research on consumer psychology shows a trade-off between perceived value and ethical/legal considerations: many consumers rationalize imitation purchases when brand signals are similar but price is much lower. Youth, fashion-conscious segments, and bargain-seeking shoppers are often overrepresented among buyers of imitated apparel.

Supply-side Dynamics and Industry Structure:

Literature on supply chains highlights the role of flexible, low-cost producers (often in informal clusters) in meeting imitation demand. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and

informal manufacturers can quickly copy popular designs and distribute them through local markets and online channels. Several works note that production clusters with close proximity to textile inputs and skilled labour (as found in parts of Maharashtra) are particularly susceptible to imitation production because of low entry barriers and established informal networks.

Economic Impacts on Original Manufacturers and Retailers:

Empirical studies across apparel sectors report multiple adverse effects of imitation Revenue and market share erosion for authentic brands, especially emerging domestic labels. Margin compression as genuine producers feel pressure to lower prices or increase promotion. Reduced incentives for innovation and design investment when imitation rapidly commodifies original creations. Differential impact on firm size: small brands without legal/financial resources suffer more than large brands that can litigate or deploy anti-counterfeit technologies.

Employment, Informality and Local Economies:

Research points to a complex effect on employment: imitation production sustains informal jobs and income for low-skilled workers, yet may undermine formal employment growth and wage improvements in the organized sector. Studies emphasize that blanket suppression of imitation without alternative livelihood plans can harm vulnerable workers in production hubs.

Research Methodology:

This study follows a mixed-method empirical research design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component focuses on survey-based data from manufacturers, retailers, and consumers, while the qualitative component includes interviews and observations to understand underlying perceptions and attitudes related to brand imitation.

Statement of the Problem:

The garment industry in Maharashtra plays a significant role in the state's economic development, generating substantial employment and contributing to domestic as well as export markets. Naik Naik & Co. describe counterfeit apparel as a "menace" that depresses revenues of genuine firms and shifts demand into unregulated channels (Naik Naik & Co., 2023)[3]

Industry sources report that 30–40 percent of the Indian textiles and apparel market may be affected by counterfeit products, indicating a large informal component in garments (Indian Textile Journal, 2024)[4] These imitation products often mimic the logos, designs, packaging styles, and labels of reputed brands at a significantly lower price, attracting cost-sensitive consumers and thereby influencing market dynamics. Despite the widespread presence of imitation apparel in key textile clusters like Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, Solapur, Kolhapur, and Ichalkaranji, empirical research analyzing the scale, influencing factors, and impact of brand imitation on different stakeholders in Maharashtra remains limited. The study also seeks to identify strategies and policy interventions required to control imitation practices and promote sustainable growth in the sector.

Need of the Study:

The garment industry in Maharashtra is one of the state's largest sectors in terms of production, employment generation, and contribution to economic growth. However, the increasing prevalence of brand imitation—the unauthorized replication of branded apparel—poses a growing threat to the sustainability and competitiveness of the industry. Despite legal frameworks and intellectual property protection

mechanisms, counterfeit and imitation garments continue to proliferate in both formal and informal markets, especially in major trading centers such as Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, Solapur, and Kolhapur.

Scope and Limitations:

Scope of the Study:

Geographical Focus: The research focuses primarily on the garment industry in Maharashtra, with reference to key textile and apparel hubs such as Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, Solapur, Kolhapur, Ichalkaranji, and Malegaon.

Industry Coverage: The study covers both organized and unorganized sectors of garment manufacturing, retail, and wholesale markets where brand imitation practices are prevalent.

Stakeholders Considered: The research examines perspectives of original brand manufacturers, imitation product manufacturers, retailers, and consumers to provide a holistic understanding of the issue.

Nature of Study: The study analyzes the economic, competitive, social, and consumer behavior impacts of brand imitation on the garment industry.

Time Frame: The study uses recent data and market trends to reflect the contemporary scenario of imitation practices and their impact on the industry.

Limitations of the Study:

Limited Geographic Generalization: Findings are based on selected districts of Maharashtra and may not fully represent the situation in other regions or nationwide industries.

Unorganized Sector Data Constraints: The informal nature of imitation manufacturing and distribution makes accurate data collection difficult, leading to potential gaps in estimation.

Time and Resource Limitations: The study is conducted within a specific time period and available resources, which may restrict sample size and depth of analysis.

Rapid Market Changes: The fashion and garment sector experiences constant changes in design trends and consumer behavior, making long-term generalization challenging.

Discussion:

The findings of this study highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of brand imitation within Maharashtra's garment industry. The practice of replicating well-known branded apparel has become increasingly widespread, driven by a combination of consumer demand, economic incentives for manufacturers, and weak enforcement of intellectual property rights. The discussion below interprets the study's results in the context of industry trends, stakeholder perspectives, and theoretical frameworks.

Economic and Market Implications:

The study reveals that brand imitation has a substantial impact on the revenue and market stability of genuine manufacturers. Authentic brands suffer financial losses due to reduced demand and price competition created by lower-cost imitation products. These economic pressures may discourage innovation and investment in product quality, marketing, and brand development. For imitation manufacturers, however, the practice serves as a profitable opportunity, especially for small-scale units in the informal sector.

Consumer Behavior and Preference:

The research indicates that a significant proportion of consumers knowingly purchase imitation garments due to affordability, aesthetic similarity to original brands, and limited awareness of quality differences. For many buyers, purchasing branded look-alikes fulfills a desire for social status at a lower cost. many buyers are aware that the goods are fake but still

view them as acceptable substitutes for originals (Verma)[5]

This demonstrates the need for enhanced consumer education about brand value and product authenticity.

Impact on Employment and Business Ethics:

Imitation garment production generates employment within informal networks, offering livelihood opportunities for workers with limited alternatives. However, the lack of regulation raises concerns over exploitation, unethical labor practices, and unsafe working environments. Genuine brands operating under formal regulations face an unfair competitive disadvantage, affecting long-term industrial sustainability.

Legal and Regulatory Challenges:

The study emphasizes that although intellectual property laws exist, enforcement remains weak due to limited monitoring capacity, corruption, and inadequate penalties. Informal markets thrive in areas with poor oversight, allowing imitation businesses to operate openly. Stronger legal intervention and digital tracking technologies are urgently required to protect brand ownership.

Technology and Global Competitiveness:

The discussion highlights the need for technological advancements such as digital authentication systems, supply chain traceability, and anti-counterfeiting innovations. Without technological adaptation, Maharashtra's garment industry may struggle to compete in domestic and global markets where brand credibility is essential.

Recommendations:

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to address the challenges posed by brand imitation and to strengthen the competitiveness of Maharashtra's garment industry:

1. Strengthening Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Enforcement: The government should establish stronger enforcement mechanisms to monitor counterfeit garment production and distribution. Stricter penalties and legal actions should be implemented against those involved in manufacturing and selling imitation products. Special task forces and rapid response units may be created in major garment markets.

2. Awareness Campaigns for Consumer Education: Awareness programs should be organized to educate consumers about the disadvantages of imitation products and the importance of supporting original brands. Survey evidence from Mumbai suggests that young consumers exhibit relatively high tolerance for fake luxury apparel compared with older cohorts (Bhatia, 2017)[6] Collaborations between industry associations, educational institutions, and media can help shape consumer attitudes.

3. Technological Measures for Anti-Counterfeiting: Adoption of digital authentication tools, such as RFID tags, QR code verification, hologram labels, blockchain-based tracking, etc. Investment in research and development for advanced anti-counterfeit packaging and labeling systems.

4. Support for Branding and Innovation: Original brand manufacturers should focus on strengthening branding strategies, enhancing product quality, and differentiating designs. Incentives may be provided by government bodies to promote innovation and creative design clusters.

5. Regulation and Formalization of Informal Manufacturing Sectors: Efforts should be made to bring small-scale imitation units under formal regulatory frameworks and ethical labor practices. This work stresses the need for stronger enforcement and specialized legal mechanisms to

combat counterfeiting in the Indian fashion sector (Gopinath, 2024).[7] Skill development programs and financial support may help informal workers transition to legitimate and productive employment.

Conclusion:

The study highlights the significant influence of brand imitation on the economic structure, competitive landscape, and consumer behavior within Maharashtra's garment industry. Brand imitation, driven by rising market demand for affordable fashion and weak enforcement of intellectual property protection, has grown into a major challenge affecting the growth and sustainability of genuine apparel brands. The findings reveal that imitation practices result in substantial revenue loss for authentic manufacturers, discourage innovation, damage brand reputation, and distort fair market competition. At the same time, imitation production supports informal employment and fulfills consumer aspirations for branded fashion at lower prices, reflecting broader socio-economic dynamics. The study also demonstrates that insufficient regulatory oversight, limited consumer awareness, and technological lag contribute to the escalation of counterfeit and imitation garments. Addressing this issue requires coordinated action involving government agencies, industry stakeholders, and consumers. Effective enforcement of intellectual property rights, adoption of advanced anti-counterfeiting technologies, consumer education, and strategic branding initiatives are essential for curbing imitation practices. While this research provides valuable insights, it acknowledges the need for future studies to explore cross-sector comparisons, psychological drivers behind imitation purchases, technological innovations, and national-level policy impacts. Strengthening industrial collaboration and research-based policymaking will be crucial for enhancing competitiveness and sustainability in the rapidly evolving garment market.

Footnotes:

1. Bhatia, V. (2017). Empirical study on factors influencing attitude and intention to purchase counterfeit fashion goods. IJFMR
2. Gopinath, P. (2024) "Combating Counterfeiting in Indian Fashion: Legal and Economic Perspectives." International (IJLLR)
3. Verma, A. "Why Consumers Buy Counterfeit Products? A Case Study of the Indian Apparel Industry." Indian Journal of Entrepreneurship / Indian Journal of Computer Science.
4. Naik Naik & Co. (2023). "Examining the Menace of Counterfeit Products in the Apparel Sector." Law-firm research note with legal and economic impact discussion.
5. Indian Textile Journal (2024). "Combating counterfeiting requires a multi-faceted approach." Indian Textile Journal, article on textiles & apparel sector losses.
6. Saniya M. Mulani & Pratima S. Salunkhe (2024). Cloth Clues : Exploring Forensic Secrets Through Maharashtra's Rich Textile Heritage." IJSRST
7. Misra, M. & Misra, S. (2023) "Unmasking Counterfeit Readymade Garments in India Using Blockchain Technology." In: Blockchain Technologies for Industrial Transformations. World Scientific.

References:

1. Chaudhry, P. E., & Zimmerman, A. (2009). The Economics of Counterfeit Trade: Governments, Consumers,
2. Bian, X., & Moutinho, L. (2011). The role of brand image, product involvement, and

knowledge in explaining consumer purchase behaviour of counterfeits.

3. Staake, T., Thiesse, F., & Fleisch, E. (2009). The emergence of counterfeit trade: A literature review.
4. Chaudhry, P., Cordell, V., & Zimmerman, A. (2005). Modeling anti-counterfeiting strategies in response to protecting intellectual property rights in a global economy.
5. Phau, I., & Teah, M. (2009). Devil wears (counterfeit) Prada: A study of antecedents and outcomes of attitudes towards counterfeits of luxury brands.
6. Grossman, G. M., & Shapiro, C. (1988). Foreign counterfeiting of status goods.
7. Wilcox, K., Kim, H. M., & Sen, S. (2009). Why do consumers buy counterfeit luxury brands?
8. World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). (2020). Counterfeit and Piracy Reports.
9. Kishor, N., & Bhatt, P. (2018). Consumer perception towards counterfeit apparel products in India.
10. Dangi, H., & Singh, S. (2021). The effect of consumer attitude on purchase intention of counterfeit fashion products in India.
11. Saniya M. Mulani & Pratima S. Salunkhe (2024). Cloth Clues : Exploring Forensic Secrets Through Maharashtra's Rich Textile Heritage.” IJSRST.
12. Naik Naik & Co. (2023). “Examining the Menace of Counterfeit Products in the Apparel Sector.” Law-firm research note with legal and economic impact discussion.
13. Indian Textile Journal (2024). “Combating counterfeiting requires a multi-faceted approach.” Indian Textile Journal, article on textiles & apparel sector losses.
14. Verma, A. “Why Consumers Buy Counterfeit Products? A Case Study of the Indian Apparel Industry.” Indian Journal of Entrepreneurship / Indian Journal of Computer Science.
15. Bhatia, V. (2017). Empirical study on factors influencing attitude and intention to purchase counterfeit fashion goods. IJFMR